



Prairie Update

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Winter Feeding Made Easier – And Less Costly!

Tim Corcoran and Kathy Brownlee run a 350-head cattle operation near Crane Valley, on the outskirts of the Missouri Coteau. Like many producers, they're always looking for ways to give their operation a boost.



Certain varieties of millet, with their waxy leaves, are well suited to swath grazing through the winter months.

easy decision to make, particularly given the cost of fuel at that time.

"It's getting pretty expensive to bale and haul feed in. This way, you just take your cows to the feed, so it's a little cheaper," says Tim, who notes that at one point last year their fuel bill was three times higher than it had ever been before.

With some financial assistance provided by the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority through the Government of Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, Corcoran and Brownlee installed four miles of perimeter fencing around three quarters that were previously being cropped. That new pasture area lets them defer grazing on three quarters of native prairie pasture until mid-summer.

Corcoran and Brownlee were able to access funds from the Habitat Stewardship Program because their native prairie pasture is home to several Burrowing Owls. By deferring grazing on the native pasture until mid-summer, they keep the cattle from interfering with the owls' crucial nesting period and allow their native grass to get the most out of its spring growth cycle.

While Corcoran acknowledges that their first priority was to enhance their own bottom line, they were pleased that their project would also help an endangered species at the same time.

"I knew the Burrowing Owls were there. I had seen them a couple-three times in the last two or three years. And they just come and go, and I leave them alone," Corcoran says.

"I was going to do this anyway, and if it helps the owls, that's good."

The pair completed the perimeter fencing last fall, in time to move the herd into a paddock of swathed millet at the start of November. Now, at the tail end of their first winter using their new grazing strategy – and a tough winter at that – they're reasonably happy with the results.

"It was kind of a brutal winter for swath grazing. All that wind made it a little hard. But we ended up leaving the cows there until February, so it wasn't too bad, really," says Corcoran.



Corcoran and Brownlee lead their cattle back to the corrals in February, after the herd spent almost four months swath grazing.

"We may only have got about half the winter out of our swath grazing, but that's quite a bit of feed for 350 cows that you don't have to put up. So it saves quite a bit of money."

Corcoran points out that not only did swath grazing save fuel and wear-and-tear on his machinery, having the cattle out on pasture also reduced the amount of manure accumulating in his corrals, leaving less clean-up work this spring.

Corcoran and Brownlee plan on swath grazing again next year, and are already thinking about ways they can improve their system. They plan on building some portable windbreaks and on installing crossfences to create smaller paddocks, both of which will help improve feed utilization. And they're also looking at diversifying their forage base.

"The millet was good, but I wouldn't mind trying some barley too. There are a few people around here who do it, and they seem to think that barley is as good as millet or better," Corcoran says.

What's New?

Take a look at some of the new projects and programs available from the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority and our partner agencies . . .

New Toilet Rebate Available For Saskatchewan

The Government of Saskatchewan is helping residents "Go Green" by offering a \$50 rebate for low-flush toilets through the new Provincial Toilet Replacement Rebate Program.

Administered by the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, the program provides a rebate to Saskatchewan home and multi-unit complex owners who replace an existing high volume toilet (13-litres per flush or higher) with a dual-flush or a 6-litres or less per flush toilet.

The program is expected to help residents replace 200,000 toilets over four years. A total of 15 million litres of water per day will be conserved, and 20,000 tonnes of CO₂ will be reduced over four years.

The Provincial Toilet Replacement Rebate Program is funded through the Go Green Fund, an initiative which provides financial support to Saskatchewan people and communities to help them Go Green.

Those interested in participating can download copies of both the single family and multi-unit application forms from the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority's website. Information and forms will also be available at Saskatchewan Watershed Authority regional offices and participating retail and wholesale outlets.

For more information, visit www.swa.ca or call (306) 694-3900.



"This program is an investment that will help protect our water supply and will lower greenhouse gas emissions through reduced water treatment and pumping requirements," said the Honourable Nancy Heppner, Minister responsible for the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, at the official launch of the Provincial Toilet Replacement Rebate Program.

Runoff Information Just a Phone Call Away

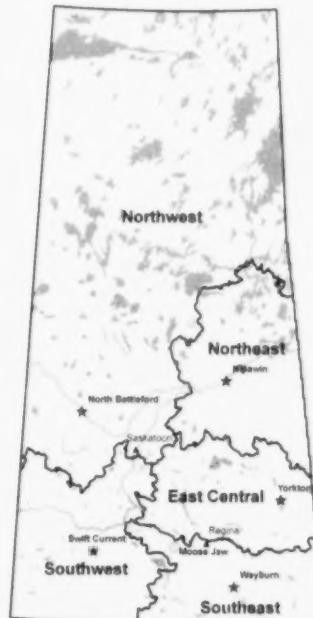
When the weather warms and the water begins to flow after a cold winter, finding out how much runoff to expect, and when, is important information.

Each spring, the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority operates a toll-free telephone information line called "Runoff Roundup." The service provides current runoff information for the whole province, as well as for each region of the province: northeast, northwest, southeast, east central and southwest.

The number for the information line is 1-866-501-0888, or 787-4742 in Regina. The line is updated every Wednesday, or more often as required due to changing conditions, until the majority of the snowpack in each region has thawed.

Callers will be asked to select which region they wish to hear the runoff forecast for, or they can choose to hear an overview for the entire province. Each update consists of a short pre-recorded message.

Transcripts of the weekly updates, as well as monthly provincial streamflow forecasts, are available at www.swa.ca.



Callers can choose to hear current runoff information for the entire province, or for their specific region.

Lower Souris Watershed Hires Group Plan Advisor



Brandy Woods, Group Plan Advisor with the Lower Souris River Watershed Stewards Inc.

Brandy Woods has recently been hired as the Group Plan Advisor for the Lower Souris River watershed. She will play a key role in the delivery of the Agri-Environmental Group Plan along with several other on-farm environmental planning programs in the area.

Brandy was raised on her family's farm west of Moosomin, and attended Olds College, graduating with a Bachelor of Applied Science majoring in agribusiness. Her

family ties and her passion for local environmental issues brought her back to southeast Saskatchewan. She is eager to provide extension information to producers to help protect ground water quality.

For more information on the Agri-Environmental Group Plan in the Lower Souris River watershed, please visit www.lowersourisriverwatershed.com. You can also contact Brandy at (306) 434-8278, or by email at brandy@lowersourisriverwatershed.com.

2009 Saskatchewan Pasture School Coming Soon!

The Saskatchewan Pasture School provides a forum for grazing managers to gain practical knowledge and expand their management skills through seminars, hands-on exercises and pasture tours.

The two-day event will feature learning opportunities with specialists from numerous partner organizations, including Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada - Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture, the Western Beef Development Centre, the Saskatchewan Forage Council, Ducks Unlimited Canada, and the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority.

Regular registrations are \$183.75 (including GST), with additional registrations from the same operation available for \$157.50 (including GST). These fees include two lunches, a BBQ supper, pasture tours, and seminar materials. Attendance is limited to 50 producers.

For more information or to register, please call the Saskatchewan Forage Council at (306) 966-2148, or e-mail office@saskforage.ca.

Discover the Missouri Coteau During Native Prairie Appreciation Week

You're invited to celebrate Saskatchewan's 11th annual Native Prairie Appreciation Week by touring one of the province's unique landscapes - the Missouri Coteau.

The Missouri Coteau covers over five million acres in south-central Saskatchewan, with approximately 31% of that area remaining in native prairie grassland. That is nearly double the average amount of native prairie remaining in the province, with some areas having retained less than one percent of their original native prairie.

From June 23rd to 25th, several workshops and tours will be held throughout the Coteau, focusing on the history and management of our province's irreplaceable grassland resources. For more information on these events or to register, please contact Daryl Nazar at (306) 569-0424 or Trevor Lennox at (306) 778-8294.

Organizing partners for the workshops and tours include Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Nature Saskatchewan, the Moose Jaw River Watershed Stewards Inc., the Society for Range Management, the Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan, and the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority.



Increased Funding for Water Projects in Southwest

The Governments of Canada and Saskatchewan are increasing funding for the Farm and Ranch Water Infrastructure Program to \$29 million. That is up from \$15 million when the program was originally announced last spring.

The program is directed to farmers, ranchers and municipalities in the 65 drought designated Rural Municipalities in southwest Saskatchewan, with the goal of providing long-term solutions to deal with drought. The funding can be used to develop on-farm wells, pipelines and dugouts, as well as community wells. The program has been very successful, with nearly 3,400 applications submitted by producers and RMs to date.

This assistance is being provided under the AgriRecovery program complementing other federal initiatives, including tax deferral for livestock producers and federal assistance under the Canada-Saskatchewan Water Supply Expansion Program. The program is cost-shared on a 60-40 basis between the federal and provincial governments.

For more information, visit the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture's website or call 1-877-874-5365.

Focus On: The Lower Qu'Appelle River Watershed

The Saskatchewan Watershed Authority is in the initial stages of launching its watershed planning process in the Lower Souris River watershed. This will be the ninth watershed in Saskatchewan to take part in the planning process.

Watershed and aquifer planning brings together local leaders from municipal governments, First Nations, and various non-government organizations, who will work in partnership as members of Watershed Advisory Committees to protect source water.

At the conclusion of the planning process, the committee will release the Lower Qu'Appelle River Watershed Protection Plan. This action plan will identify source water protection priorities that have been identified by the people living in the watershed. They will clearly state what needs to be done and by whom, and will specify realistic timelines within which these actions must be completed. Typically the plans require three years to complete.



New Abandoned Well Decommissioning Video to be Released



Abandoned small-diameter wells such as this one provide a direct pathway for contaminants to reach an aquifer. The new video discusses some of the procedures that need to be followed to properly decommission this type of well.

Abandoned wells can provide a direct pathway for contaminants to enter the aquifer, thus contaminating precious water supplies. As well, they can permit cross-contamination between different aquifers along the length of the borehole if the well was constructed improperly or is in a deteriorated condition. Other wells drawing water from the same aquifer may also become contaminated.

Abandoned wells should be properly sealed to prevent the vertical movement of water. This will help prevent contamination, eliminate safety hazards and avoid costly liability issues. Making sure that the well is properly decommissioned is the responsibility of the landowner.

The Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, with assistance from the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada - Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, will release a video dealing with the decommissioning of an abandoned small diameter well in the spring of 2009.

In addition to stressing the importance of decommissioning small diameter drilled wells and demonstrating acceptable decommissioning methods, the video will provide information on small diameter well drilling techniques, the importance of driller's reports, and the dangers posed by well pits.

There are many abandoned water wells in Saskatchewan which have not been properly sealed and decommissioned. These wells pose serious risks to people, livestock, farm machinery and our water sources.

"The proper sealing of abandoned wells is often overlooked as an important step in aquifer protection and the management of ground water supplies," said Rob Walcer, Senior Technologist with Ground Water Management at the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority.

"The decommissioning of both small and large diameter wells must only be conducted by a qualified contractor with knowledge of all procedures and ground water protection methods," said Walcer. "This will ensure that the well is sealed properly, and that potential safety hazards posed by some abandoned wells will be addressed by those with special training and equipment."

The DVD package will also include the first video of the series, which focuses entirely on the decommissioning of a large diameter well. Both videos will be presented on one DVD in both English and French.

"A second video dealing specifically with the decommissioning of a small diameter well was determined to be an essential component of our overall education package," said Walcer. "Small diameter wells are considerably more complicated to decommission than a bored well; if improperly decommissioned, it is very costly and nearly impossible to correct the problem."

Walcer adds that the information contained in the videos will benefit the agricultural community as a whole, since ground water represents a significant water supply in rural areas. This information is also invaluable to producers, as they are legally responsible for the proper decommissioning of wells on their property.



Filling the well with grout from the bottom up, using a special pump and a tremie line, is important to ensure the well is properly sealed. This should be handled by an experienced contractor.

Other educational resources on ground water protection offered by the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority include *A Landowner's Guide to Water Well Management*, a document which provides important information on the management and protection of ground water supplies.

Watch for updates on the status of this video on the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority's website, www.swa.ca. For more information on abandoned water well decommissioning, contact the Ground Water Management branch of the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority at (306) 694-3900 or groundwater@swa.ca.

This project has been made possible through financial assistance provided by the Canada-Saskatchewan Water Supply Expansion Program.

Saskatchewan Water Wise Quiz

Now Available On-Line

The Saskatchewan Watershed Authority recently launched its new Water Wise Quiz, an on-line educational tool that will help kids and adults be more aware of how much water they are using at home.

The quiz takes people through the home of a colourful cast of characters called the "Splashy Family." As users go through the quiz, they are asked a series of questions about how much water they use in various areas of their own home, including the kitchen, the bathroom and the laundry room, as well as outside in their yard.

At the end of the quiz, their answers are added up and the user is presented with the results: their yearly water usage compared to a "water wise" user. The amount of water a "water wise" person uses is based on a mix of water conservation minded water use habits with water saving

devices in their home. After they get their results, people can also access some helpful tips on ways that they can save water.

The Water Wise Quiz is just one of the many initiatives that have been launched under Saskatchewan's Water Conservation Plan. Emphasizing government leading by example, public education and partnerships with communities, agriculture and industry, the plan is a significant step toward ensuring that greater attention is paid to water conservation as a social, environmental and economic driver. The Provincial Toilet Replacement Rebate Program is also a part of this plan.

To try out the Water Wise Quiz, please visit the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority's website, www.swa.ca.

Hello Voluntary Stewards!

Thank you for taking the time to read the Spring 2009 edition of the Prairie Update! As always, we hope you have enjoyed the articles included in this newsletter, and we welcome any comments you have. And of course, our sincere thanks go to those who agreed to share their stories with us in these pages.

We particularly hope you enjoyed our article on Tim Corcoran and Kathy Brownlee, who found a way to cut their cattle feeding costs and protect an endangered species all at the same time. Their story is one more example of Saskatchewan producers whose willingness to try new management strategies made a positive contribution to habitat conservation efforts – and made good economic sense too!

You can find more information on the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority's Prairie Stewardship Program in back issues of this newsletter. These issues, as well as interactive maps featuring other stewardship project demonstration sites, can be viewed on our website, www.swa.ca.

Ryan Lorge

Share Your Ideas!

If you have comments or ideas about this newsletter, please contact:

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Coming Events

For more information on stewardship events near you, please contact the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority office nearest you:

North Battleford	Jeremy Brown	446-7460
Regina	Etienne Soulodre	787-0661
Swift Current	Krista Connick	778-8280
	Bob Springer	778-8301
	JeanAnne Prysliak	778-8424
Weyburn	Stacey Gulka	848-2354
Yorkton	Jason Puckett	786-5845
	Lyndon Hicks	786-1496